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ABSTRACT

These documents are designed to help seventh grade students in New York State understand the role of women and the structure and function of the family in both New York and U.S. history. Students are introduced to the state's first two first ladies: Cornelia Tappen Clinton (1744-1800) and Sarah Livingston Jay (1756-1802). Between 1777 and 1804, George Clinton served seven terms as governor of New York, while John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, was elected as the state's chief executive in both 1796 and 1798. Individual profiles of the lives and times of Cornelia Tappen Clinton and Sarah Livingston Jay are featured. A separate document for teachers suggesting educational activities utilizing the profiles of the first ladies is included. (DB)

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ED346005

First Ladies of New York State

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ERA

(1777-1800)

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First Ladies of New York State

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ERA

1777-1800

Educational Activities for the Seventh Grade Curriculum

Jane D. Begos

GOALS

- ☆ To develop the student's ability to compare, understand, respect, and accept the role of women in history, and to explore their values, beliefs, and attitudes;
- ☆ To increase the student's knowledge of the role of the structure and function of family at the beginning of our state's and nation's history, and to make them aware of changes that have taken place;
- ☆ To enable the student to demonstrate an appreciation for the flow of human history.

SOCIAL STUDIES SKILLS UTILIZED

- ☆ The ability to collect, organize, process, and communicate accurate social studies information and ideas and to form a set of standards in order to apply them to the evaluation of assumptions, sources, evidence, reasoning, and arguments;
- ☆ The ability to identify and locate appropriate sources of information and to measure or qualify them as to reliability;
- ☆ The ability to infer meaning, biases, assumptions, and points of view implied but not stated in the sources, and to identify similarities and differences in the data given in order to group like items together.

ACTIVITY/DISCUSSION

Assign the information in this educational packet to each student in the class or designate a student or group of students to prepare a report to be presented to the class on Cornelia Clinton, Sarah Jay, Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush, and Matilda Cuomo.

The object of this activity is to point up the differences between the life styles and the personal styles of New York's first two "First Ladies" and to compare them to the former First Lady of the United States, Nancy Reagan, and to the present First Lady, Barbara Bush, and to the present First Lady of New York State, Matilda Cuomo.

Today, the news media–radio, television, newspapers, and magazines–are able to focus a very strong spotlight on the lives of women married to our state and national leaders. Because of this, we know a lot about the way they dress, the way they think, the way they entertain, the way they interact with their families, and the public roles they espouse within the framework of priorities established by the chief executive.

In the beginnings of our nation and state, the wives of our leaders were not subjected to such public scrutiny, nor were they expected to adopt an "agenda" of their own. They were unknown beyond the circle of their families and friends. All we know about them today is what we can infer from rare portraits and from contemporary references in letters, diaries, and memoirs.

Begin the discussion by emphasizing this fact. Then, after the students have studied the material or heard the reports, ask the following questions. The discussion may be ended with the question as to whether the students think today's media coverage of women of position is of value and why.

Cornelia Clinton and Sarah Jay both fulfilled their roles as wives and mothers according to the eighteenth-century definition of those roles. Both women also belonged to the same social class; they knew each other and had many mutual friends. As wives of men who were leaders in forming our state and national governments, they had to meet the additional challenge of helping their husbands in this exciting but demanding work. Each woman did this in her own way, and each woman fulfilled the roles of wife and mother in her own way. These ways were different, according to the personality of the individual. Although eighteenth-century women had to submit to many restrictions that women of the 1980s do not, it is interesting to observe how these two women were able to express their own tastes and temperaments within such a rigid framework.

ACTIVITY 1: DISCUSSION

A. Look at the portraits of Cornelia Clinton and Sarah Jay. Remind the students that Cornelia Clinton was thirteen years older than Sarah Jay. Tell them that Cornelia's portrait was painted in New York in 1797, at the age of fifty-three; and that Sarah's portrait was painted in Paris in 1783, when she was twenty-six. With these things in mind, what can you observe about the style of dress of these two women? Which do you feel is more "high fashion" for the era?

From a newspaper or magazine, clip out a picture of Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush. What can you observe from the style of dress of these two women? Which eighteenth-century woman can you compare to which twentieth-century woman?

From a newspaper or magazine, clip out a picture of

Matilda Cuomo. What can you observe about her style of dress?

B. One of the functions of women married to men in public office is to plan and act as hostess at official social functions. Women in our society plan and hostess social functions for their friends and relatives. From the description of the types of social functions that Cornelia Clinton preferred (See text, pages 5, 6), and those that Sarah Jay liked to plan (see text, page 6), what can you infer about the entertaining style of these two women? What do you know about the state functions that Nancy Reagan has hosted at the White House, and about her personal entertaining style at the Reagan ranch in California? What do you know about Barbara Bush's entertaining at the Bush summer home in Maine? What do you expect will be Mrs. Bush's style of entertaining at state functions in the White House? What kind of entertaining does Matilda Cuomo do?

C. From the information available in the text, what do you know of the family life of Cornelia Clinton and Sarah Jay? How many children did they have, and how did they interact with them? How many children does Nancy Reagan have, and how does she interact with them? Barbara Bush? Matilda Cuomo?

ACTIVITY 2: ARCHIVE ALIVE

A major source of information on the daily lives of women in earlier times comes from the diaries and letters they kept. From these records, we learn what their daily tasks were, how they accomplished them, what their social activities were, what their illnesses were and how they were treated, who their friends and relatives were, and what they thought about them.

The students are probably familiar with diary keeping. Perhaps they have read or studied *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

Have the students keep a daily diary or write daily letters to a "friend" for one week. At the end of the week, let them share selections from their diaries and letters and see how much social history they can find about the life of a middle-school student in the 1980s. What do they eat? What do they wear? Do they buy it or make it? What do they study in school and how do they like it? What forms of recreation do they like? Who are the members of their families?

After the students have shared their class assignments, ask if any of them keep a diary. Do they know anybody who does? Have they ever read a published diary? Have they ever read the diary of a friend or relative? Do they have any letters at home that they received in the past year? Do they keep letters or know anybody who does? How do they think the telephone will affect the documentary record?

ACTIVITY 3
Independent Study
(Recommended for highly motivated students or for a group project.)

U.S. Constitution: Amendment XIX. Ratified August 18, 1920.

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Using local newspapers, magazine articles, speeches, sermons, and other printed material, examine the woman suffrage movement in your community. How did your city/town/county vote? How did New York's representatives and senators vote on the Nineteenth Amendment?

Portray the results of the vote on the Nineteenth Amendment in New York State graphically, county by county. Where was the Amendment defeated? Why? This exercise can also be targeted to your specific community by examining local voting records. Who were the local leaders and organizations who backed the movement? What individuals or organizations opposed woman suffrage?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

For the Teacher:

1. If possible, organize a field trip to a nearby historic site, local history museum, or re-creation of a period farm. Before the trip, have the students pull as many references to women's work in the home and in the field as they can find. Some are mentioned in this packet. At the site you have chosen, have the students look at the kitchen or laundry room, at heating fixtures and lighting devices. Ask them to compare and contrast these areas with the same areas in their own homes. Have them compare the amount of time and work their mothers spend on food preparation, laundry, and maintaining heating and lighting devices with the amount of time women such as Cornelia Clinton and Sarah Jay would have spent on these household chores. Remind them that both eighteenth-century women would have had servants, but that they also had the need to supervise their servants and often did the work themselves.

2. In the classroom, have students celebrate their foremothers and women of position in their community today by finding as much as they can about them and their work, and by collecting their pictures, if possible. Then post the pictures with a caption created by the students.

For the Students:

1. Visit an art museum and study portraits and old photographs of women. Remember that having a portrait painted was an expensive and time-consuming project; people would wear their best clothes for such a portrait. As the camera replaced the artist, it became possible to catch people at unprepared moments, at work and at play. Compare the styles of dress in old portraits with styles of dress in photographs of you and your family today. Observe and describe about the differences.

2. Collect information on some prominent woman in your community – the wife of a man in public office, a woman in public office, a prominent business woman, a prominent scientist, artist, or musician, etc. Include newspaper and magazine articles, photographs you may be able to take, programs of events you attend where she appears in some capacity, etc. See how much you can learn about this person in this way. Why do you admire this woman?

"First Ladies of New York State" activity sheet created by Jane Begos, consultant to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Ms. Begos is a specialist in women's diaries, having compiled and published the first *Annotated Bibliography of of Published Women's Diaries* (1977). For ten years, she was programs director at the John Jay Homestead, a New York State Historic Site. To obtain further information regarding her current work on the American Women's Diaries Project, write: Jane Begos, P.O. Box 247, Rhinebeck, New York 12572.

First Ladies of New York State

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CORNELIA TAPPEN CLINTON

1744-1800

First Ladies of New York State

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ERA

Portrait of Mrs. George Clinton by Thomas Bluget de Valdenuit. Charcoal and chalk on paper. 1797.

Courtesy Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute. Photo by G.R. Farley.

The population of New York State in the constitutional era is estimated at approximately 300,000, nearly three-quarters of whom were women and children. Their contributions to the development of the Empire State have recently earned the belated but welcome attention of scholars, authors, and educators as they re-examine the events that led first to independence and then to the establishment of our state and national governments.

Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, George Clinton, and other state and national leaders all shared their domestic and political lives with perceptive and industrious women from influential families--women like Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton, Sarah Livingston Jay, and Cornelia Tappen Clinton. The bicentennial of the United States Constitution, approved on September 17, 1787; New York's ratification of that document on July 26, 1788; and the Bill of Rights, proposed by Congress on September 26, 1789, have stimulated renewed interest in the lives of both the men *and* women of this period.

This publication introduces today's New Yorkers to this state's first two "First Ladies": Cornelia Tappen Clinton (1744-1800) and Sarah Livingston Jay (1756-1802). Between 1777 and 1804, George Clinton served seven terms as governor of New York while John Jay, the first chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, was elected as the state's chief executive in both 1796 and 1798. For more than twenty-five years, the political, military, diplomatic, and constitutional milestones of their husbands' lives intersected in a series of exhilarating, but often bewildering and dismaying events for their wives and families.

Cornelia Tappen Clinton rarely, if ever, travelled beyond the boundaries of New York State, preferring the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker expected of women of her time. As the state's first "First Lady," she entertained persons as prominent as George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette. A traditional, well-to-do matron, she excelled in the domestic sphere, shunning the public life that her position offered.

In stark contrast, Sarah Livingston Jay may be characterized as a member of the eighteenth-century international jet set. Young, beautiful, and socially adroit--she accompanied her husband to Europe during his tenure as the American minister plenipotentiary to Spain in 1779 and as peacemaker (together with Benjamin Franklin and John Adams) at Paris in 1782.

While far from typical in their life-course profiles, they share a range of experiences common to all American women of the late eighteenth century. They managed households, cared for the ill, gave birth to (and buried) several children, and suffered from the loneliness imposed by a series of military conflicts. In addition, they often anguished over stinging public criticism of the political and diplomatic decisions advanced by their husbands.

Cornelia Clinton and Sarah Jay, along with thousands of their contemporaries have bequeathed a legacy of personal sacrifice and steady devotion to the founding of our state and our nation.

Margaret Gordon-Cooke

TAPPEN GENEALOGY

Wynkoop Coat of Arms.

Courtesy of The New York State Library
Manuscripts and Special Collections Division.

Cornelia Tappen (1744-1800) was born into an established and influential family in Ulster County, New York, her Dutch ancestors having arrived in New Netherland in the seventeenth century.

Cornelia's mother, Tjaatje (Charity) Wynkoop (1710-1793), was the daughter of Cornelius Wynkoop, Jr., and Barbara Mathyson. The Wynkoop name signifies "wine-buyer" or "wine-merchant." The family first appeared in America in 1642; Peter Wynkoop settled in Rensselaerswyck (Albany) as "Commissioner Superintendent of Wares & Merchandise" for the patroon, Jeremias Van Rensselaer.

Cornelia's father, Petrus Tappen (1716-1748), was the son of Christoffel and Cornelia (Vas) Tappen. He was born in Kingston and was a descendant of Jurian Teunisse Tappen, a glassmaker, who immigrated from Holland to America in the early 1600s. Petrus Tappen was an eminent, substantial landholder of the Kingston corporation.

Tjaatje Wynkoop and Petrus Tappen were married July 2, 1736, by Domine Petrus Vas at the Reformed Dutch Church of Kingston. Their first son, Christoffel (1737), their second son, Pieter (1738), and their first daughter, Cornelia (1740), all died in infancy, victims of the high eighteenth-century mortality rate. The Tappen's fourth child, Christoffel (1742-1826), became a trustee of Kingston and a clerk of the corporation and was a member of the New York Provincial Congress from 1775-1777. The youngest Tappen, Petrus (1748-), was born barely five months after his father's unfortunate early death. He became a noted Ulster County physician and also dabbled in politics.

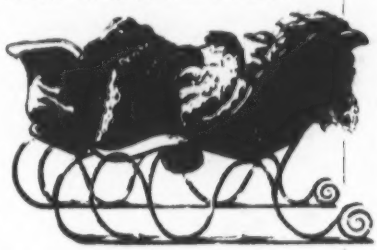
Wynkoop motto:
Virtutem Hilaritate Colere

"To Adorn Excellence with Joyousness"

Cornelia (1744-1800), the Tappen's second daughter, was named after her grandmother, perpetuating the eighteenth-century custom of naming their infants after grandparents, aunts, uncles, and deceased siblings. At the age of twenty-six, Cornelia married George Clinton (1739-1812), then a young lawyer, part-time surveyor, and member of the New York General Assembly. Less than eight years later, he became New York State's first elected governor, and Cornelia its first "First Lady."

THE EARLY YEARS

On Wednesday evening, February 7, 1770, George Clinton and Cornelia Tappen, in the company of Anthony Hoffman and Jannitje Wynkoop, left the village of Kingston and travelled by sleigh to East Camp (now Germantown). There, they were married by the Reverend Gerhard Daniel Koch, pastor of the Reformed Dutch Church.



This marriage allied George Clinton to both the Tappens and the Wynkoops, families of considerable political influence in Ulster County. Furthermore, both families were ardent opponents of the Crown and Parliament and were to become patriots in the American Revolution.

George Clinton's parents, Colonel Charles Clinton (1690-1773) and Elisabeth Denniston Clinton, immigrated to America from Dublin in 1729. Of the Clinton's first three children, Catharine, (1723-1762), James (1726-1729), and Mary (1728-1729), only Catharine survived the outbreak of measles on board ship shortly after their departure from Dublin. Their ship, the *George and Anne*, dropped anchor at Cape Cod, Massachusetts October 4, 1729, and the Clintons spent their first winter there.

The following year the family moved to Ulster County, New York, and named their homestead, "Little Britain." It was here that four more sons, Alexander (1732-1758), Charles, Jr. (1734-1779), James (1733-1812), and George (1739-1812) were born. George was named for his distant cousin and royal governor of New York, George Clinton (1743-1753), who showed a special interest in his namesake, and appointed him clerk of the Court of Common Pleas of Ulster County. George served in this capacity in person or through a deputy from 1759 to his death in 1812.

After their marriage, the Clintons moved to their new home at New Windsor. Their farm was located on a hillside that commanded a superb southerly view of the rugged Hudson highlands. The newlyweds apparently enjoyed decorating their first residence. They shopped in New York City for paint, sheet iron for the fireplaces, English superfine tiles, paper for the walls, and pots and kettles for the kitchen. The Clinton's first two children were born at New Windsor: Catharine, on November 5, 1770, and Cornelia, on June 29, 1774.

Times were prosperous for the young Clintons; Cornelia maintained her home and cared for her husband and children. George busied himself with farming and milling, pursued his law practice, and spent several months a year representing Ulster County in the New York General Assembly. By 1775, Clinton was devoting most of his time to public service. On December 19 of that year, the New York Committee of Safety appointed him brigadier general of the Ulster and Orange county militia in response to the threat of impending hostilities with Great Britain.

Parsonage of Reformed Church, Germantown, unchanged since 1746.
Courtesy Dutch Reformed Church, Germantown.

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THE WAR YEARS

Homestead where George Clinton was born July 26, 1739. Located in Ulster (now Orange) County.

An unpretentious dwelling, this story-and-a-half cottage had one large room for living, cooking and eating, and one room for sleeping on the second floor. As the family prospered, more rooms were added. The house was demolished in the nineteenth century.

It was at this residence that George Clinton received his early education from a clergyman, Daniel Thain.

The Clintons were Presbyterians and attended services at the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, which was located on the road to New Windsor.

During the Revolutionary War, Cornelia and her family remained in close touch with the general. His headquarters, from which he commanded both militia and Continental Army troops, was located within several miles of their homestead at New Windsor. When conditions permitted, Cornelia accompanied her husband on inspection tours of nearby military installations.

In September of 1776, the British burned New York City, destroying 1000 homes. The refugees fled north to patriot-held Hudson River counties and moved in with relatives and friends, straining already tight provisions and housing.

Like other military wives, Cornelia supplied her husband with fresh linen and personal items, and the children often packed gifts of butter, tea, and snuff to send to the general. His monthly salary of $125.00 allowed them to maintain a relatively comfortable standard of living.

Letters from home kept General Clinton informed of daily activities. John McKesson, a family friend, advised him of Cornelia's presence at church in New Windsor, and concluded with news of the children. "Caty is well, tho' her Eyes are weak" he wrote, and "Cornelia is the best girl I ever saw at her age."

In July of 1777, George Clinton took the oath of office as New York State's first chief executive, making Cornelia Tappen Clinton the first "First Lady." The burdens of statesmanship contributed to their already heavy wartime responsibilities. Having moved to Poughkeepsie, Cornelia occupied the Crannell house from 1778 to 1783, where the Clintons' next three children—George, Elizabeth, and Martha—were born.

George Washington Clinton (1778-1813). The namesake of General George Washington was a disappointment to his parents—inheriting neither political nor legal skills.

from *His Excellency George Clinton*

Elizabeth Clinton (1780-1825), married Matthias B. Tallmadge October 25, 1803.

Courtesy of Yale University Art Gallery

George Clinton was the first elected governor of New York State. On July 30, 1777, at the courthouse in Kingston, Pierre Van Cortlandt administered the oath of office to George Clinton.

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HARDSHIP CONTINUES

Cornelia and George Clinton.
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

Cornelia Clinton grieved for her neighbors as the enemy set fire to Kingston in October of 1777, demolishing every house. For days, unburied bodies lay in the streets. Survivors drove the remaining livestock to the interior, and made efforts to secure the harvest before raiding parties could carry it off. With two children and sixty head of sheep and cattle to care for, Cornelia abandoned her furniture, but managed to save vital crops of buckwheat, potatoes, turnips, and cabbage. General Clinton considered moving his family to Connecticut as the situation grew more alarming. Adding to the toll of battle injured, an epidemic of smallpox swept through the region early in 1778.

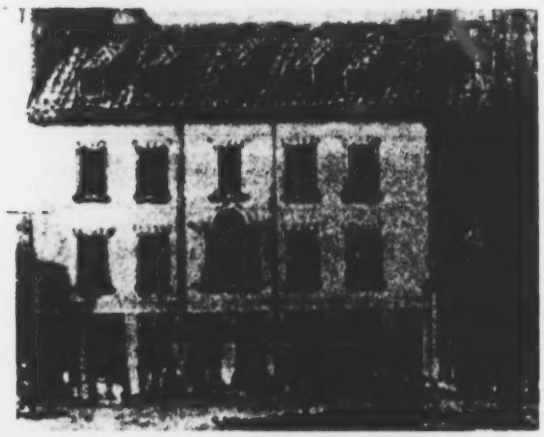
During this period, Cornelia became fast friends with Martha Washington, as General George Washington and Major General George Clinton devised defensive plans for the expected British invasion through New York's waterways. The wartime hardships were keenly felt by the mistresses of farms, taverns, and shops, as inflated paper currency replaced hard specie and military service drew fathers, husbands, and sons away from home. The labor-intensive life style of the late eighteenth century was shifted to the women, who assumed responsibility for the survival of their families on meager rations, restricted commerce, and a soldier's salary of four dollars a month.

In spite of these discouraging conditions, Cornelia Clinton and other New York women contributed to the ever-increasing demands of the military by weaving cloth, collecting lead for ammunition, brewing rum, operating mills, and farming.

Martha Dandridge Custis Washington (1731-1802).
Perhaps one common bond between Cornelia and Martha Washington was their mutual dislike for the limelight. Martha conceded that "many younger and gayer women would be extremely pleased," referring to her status as First Lady, but I would "much rather be at home."

Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union.

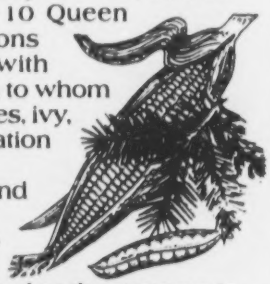
AT HOME IN NEW YORK CITY



No. 10 Queen Street, a three-story mansion built by New York City Mayor Abraham dePeyster in the late 1600s.

Courtesy The New York Historical Society

After the war, Cornelia and George Clinton moved to New York City in 1784, where they occupied a house at No. 10 Queen (later Pearl) Street. The Clintons maintained their friendship with General and Mrs. Washington, to whom they sent lime and balsam trees, ivy, corn, and peas for their plantation at Mount Vernon, Virginia.



In 1785, the Clinton's sixth and last child, Maria, was born. Alexander Clinton, the governor's nephew, also resided at No. 10 Queen Street, and served as the governor's personal secretary.

Many of the Revolution's most important figures lived within a few blocks of their East Ward neighborhood--Alexander and Elizabeth Schuyler Hamilton; John Jay and his wife, Sally Livingston Jay; Mr. and Mrs. Alexander McDougall, and William and Kitty Duer, among others. These families faced new challenges when confronted with the political and economic dilemmas spawned by the deterioration of the Articles of Confederation. Old allies became enemies as the struggle for approval of the United States Constitution reached its zenith in New York in July of 1788. Now in his eleventh year as governor, George Clinton led the Antifederalists, the opponents of ratification, who dominated the New York ratifying convention at Poughkeepsie. With New York City a Federalist stronghold, Cornelia Clinton seldom socialized with his former comrades and their wives, but relied on her large, close-knit family for companionship. She taught the girls knitting and embroidery and instructed them in household management.

On July 26, 1788, the political drama at the Dutchess County Courthouse was resolved in favor of ratification, and New York celebrated its role as the "eleventh pillar of the federal republic." Cornelia heard the cannons' salute from the Battery and listened to the simultaneous ringing of church bells throughout the city.

Abigail Adams Smith.

In 1788, while the governor was under attack for his strong opposition to the Constitution, Abigail Adams Smith wrote the following:

"We were invited to dine with the Governor, which was a very particular favor. He nor his family neither visit, or are visited by, any families either in public or private life. He sees no company, and is not much beloved. His conduct in many respects is censured, perhaps unjustly. To me he appears one whose conduct and motives of action are not to be seen through upon a slight examination. The part he has taken upon the subject of the new Constitution is much condemned. . .Mrs. Clinton is not showy, but a kind, friendly woman."

Cornelia's silver basting spoon, crafted by Andrew Billings, Poughkeepsie.

Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

NEW YORK CITY: FIRST FEDERAL CAPITAL

Cornelia carried this fan at an Inaugural Ball honoring George Washington in April of 1789.

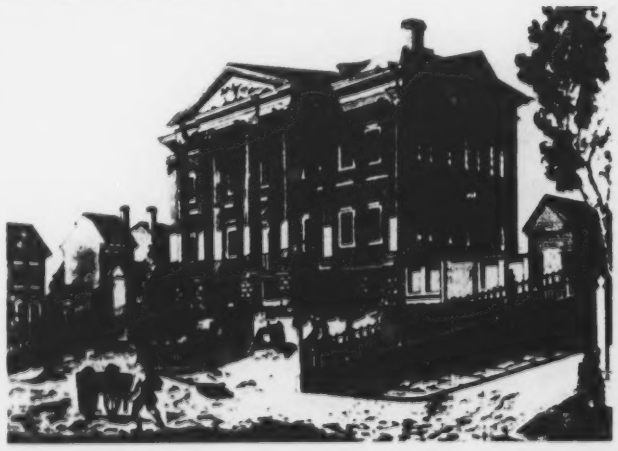
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

THE INNER CIRCLE

The Washingtons and Clintons frequently dined together and often attended the John Street Theater, where "The Old Soldier" and "A School for Scandal" were popular with New York audiences. Governor and Mrs. Clinton hosted a formal dinner for the new president and his lady prior to the inaugural festivities, and joined hundreds of other New Yorkers at an inaugural ball that followed the April 30, 1789, oath-taking ceremonies at Federal Hall.

From 1791 to 1794, the Clintons resided at Government House, built at Bowling Green to house the president of the United States when New York City was the first federal capital. It was never occupied by President and Mrs. Washington, however, who lived at No. 3 Cherry Street, a house built by Walter Franklin.

The Clintons spent leisure time at a farm purchased from James Rivington in a suburb known as Greenwich. Located on the banks of the Hudson in "The Burgomasters' Bowery," the farm appealed to the Clintons with its rustic appearance, its cottage-like dwellings, its orchards, and its view of the river.



From 1791-1794, the Clintons occupied Government House. The mansion built on the site of Fort George at Bowling Green was originally intended to house the president of the United States; however, it was left unfinished when the federal government moved to Philadelphia.

Courtesy New York Public Library.

OBLIGATIONS FULFILLED

A little more than three months after their daughter, Cornelia, married "Citizen" Genet, twelve year-old Martha Washington Clinton, Cornelia's fifth child, died. It appears that Cornelia took great comfort from visits to the Greenwich farm, and a grandson, born in November of 1795, helped to fill the void.

In 1795, after eighteen years of public service, George Clinton temporarily retired. From 1795 until 1800, he was able to spend a substantial amount of time with his family at Greenwich where he attended to personal matters and recouped his health.

Late in the fall of 1799, Cornelia became very ill. Her physician, Dr. Young, held out hope for recovery, but she died on March 15, 1800, at the age of fifty-six. George Clinton, "the aged governor," was deeply affected by the loss of his "dearest wife." During their thirty-year marriage, she had been a devoted wife and mother.

Cornelia Clinton did not seek to exploit her position and did not appear to relish the public role that was occasionally thrust upon her. She entertained when necessary, but was most comfortable when surrounded by her immediate family and close friends. As a contemporary observed, she was "not showy, but a kind, friendly woman," more than fulfilling the obligations expected of women in the constitutional period. Had she lived for another decade, Cornelia could have claimed a national role by virtue of George Clinton's two terms as vice president of the United States in the administrations of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

Clinton Coat of Arms.
Courtesy of the New York State Library

Cornelia Clinton Genet (1774-1810)
In 1794, the Clinton's daughter Cornelia, married the French ambassador, Edmond Charles (Citizen) Genet. The wedding took place on November 6, 1794 at Government House.

from HIS EXCELLENCY GEROGE CLINTON, Spaulding.

SARAH LIVINGSTON JAY

1756-1802

First Ladies of New York State

THE CONSTITUTIONAL ERA

Sarah Van Brugh Livingston Jay. Oil on canvas by Daniel Huntington, 1783.
Courtesy New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

The European Scene

Americans seldom recall the names of the women who administered vast territories of the world at a time when the United States Constitution withheld its privileges from more than half of our population.

For nearly three-quarters of the eighteenth century, Russia was ruled by female sovereigns. Catherine the Great, for example, reigned with unchallenged authority from 1762 to 1796. Elsewhere, Portugal's Queen Marie ruled from 1777 to 1816, and Maria Theresa succeeded to the Austrian throne after her husband's death, wielding power for forty years. Keen protectors of their own monarchies, all shared an interest in the negotiations that followed the close of hostilities between America and Great Britain. A century earlier, Elizabeth I of England had consolidated her realm, dominated her European neighbors, and supported the colonization of the New World. Although eighteenth-century England restricted suffrage for men and denied it to women, many began to consider the implications of Mary Wollstonecraft's epic work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in London in 1797.

Catherine the Great of Russia.

The American Scene

Present also, but in lower profile, were the mothers, wives, and daughters of the men who guided our road to liberty. Abigail Adams' memorable advice to her husband to "remember the ladies" as he prepared the first drafts of the Declaration of Independence demonstrated her keen perception of the new roles women would one day play. Her correspondence with Mercy Otis Warren and others also revealed a strong commitment to the principles underlying America's drive for independence.

Abigail Adams.
Courtesy Massachusetts Historical Society.

Along with thousands of other New York women, Cornelia Tappen Clinton and Sarah Livingston Jay contributed to the period that staged the founding of our Republic. By virtue of their close association with the major actors on that stage, they hold a unique place in our history. As New York's first two "First Ladies," their lives were linked to the destiny of the nation.

Shirley A. Rice

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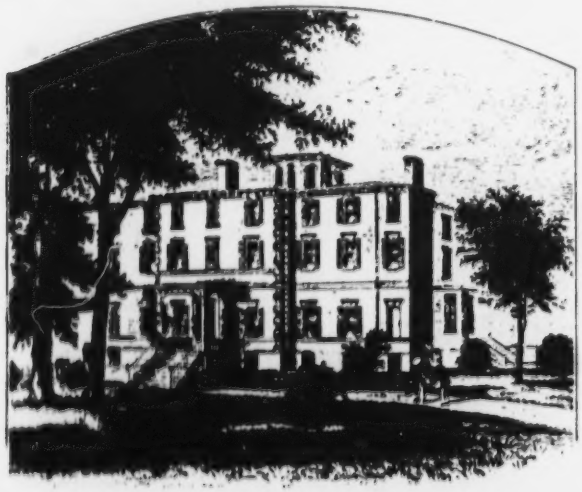
SALLY

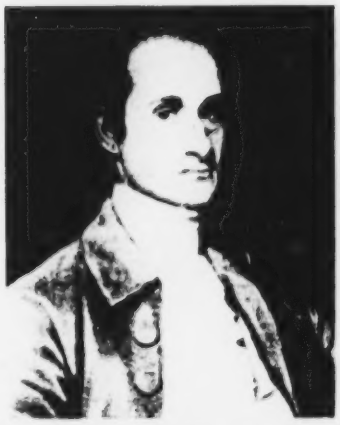
Sarah Livingston Jay.
Pastel by Sharples.
Courtesy New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

William Livingston, New Jersey's first state governor, and his wife, Susannah French Livingston, raised their large family at their Elizabethtown, New Jersey, home, "Liberty Hall." Sarah (Sally) Van Brugh Livingston (1756-1802), the eighth of their thirteen children, spent her adolescence on this comfortable rural estate overlooking the Elizabeth River.

There, she listened with youthful curiosity to the discussions about rebellion and independence that monopolized her father, who represented New Jersey in the Continental Congress. William Livingston's colleagues and fellow patriots included Alexander Hamilton and John Jay, two young New Yorkers who often sought the counsel of their distinguished host and the companionship of his attractive daughters.



A nineteenth-century engraving of "Liberty Hall": William and Susannah Livingston brought their young family from New York City to this spacious New Jersey residence in 1772.



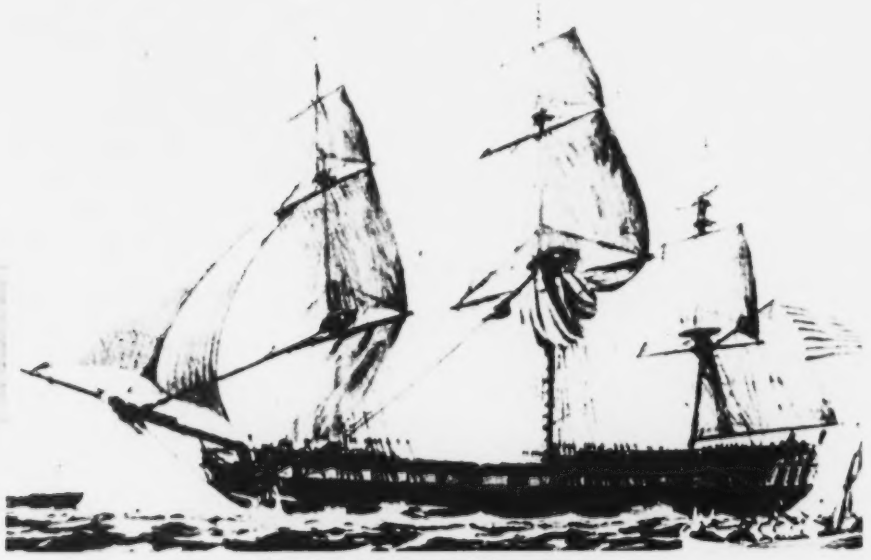
John Jay
President of the Continental Congress; co-author of The Federalist; first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court; Governor of New York State, 1795-1801. Oil on canvas by Kellert, after Stuart.
Courtesy New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

On April 28, 1774, Sally Livingston and John Jay exchanged wedding vows in the great parlor at Liberty Hall. She was seventeen; Jay, twenty-eight.

The first years of marriage separated the young couple. Sally remained at Elizabethtown while he immersed himself in the deteriorating situation between Great Britain and her American colonies. Jay was the principal author of New York's first state constitution, served on revolutionary committees, and shuttled between east coast cities, reporting to the Continental Congress.

Eventually, British troops threatened Liberty Hall. On November 29, 1777, Kitty (Catherine) Livingston reported to her sister, Sally, residing in Philadelphia, that "everything [had been] carried off [including] hinges, locks, and panes of glass."

VOYAGE TO EUROPE



The *Confederacy* took Sally and John on the first leg of the trip to Spain.
Courtesy of the Bruce Gallery, Memphis, Tennessee.

In October of 1779, Sally accompanied her husband to Europe, where as minister plenipotentiary to Spain, he pursued efforts to secure loans for American military operations. They left their three year-old son, Peter Augustus, with her parents in Elizabethtown and embarked on the *Confederacy*.

Before a gale forced them to put in at Martinique for repairs, Sally spent lazy shipboard afternoons writing long letters to family and friends. Lengthening distance sharpened her admiration for America. To her sister, Kitty, she wrote:

"Where is the country where Justice is so impartially administered, industry encouraged, health and smiling plenty so bounteous to all as in our favored country? And are not those blessings, each of them resulting from or matured by freedom, worth contending for? What have I to do with politicks! Am I not myself a woman, and writing to Ladies?"

Further delays necessitated chartering passage on the *Aurora*, which departed St. Pierre for Cadiz in December, 1779.

Sally toured the sugar mills on Martinique while the *Confederacy* underwent repairs.
Courtesy Jay Papers, Special Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

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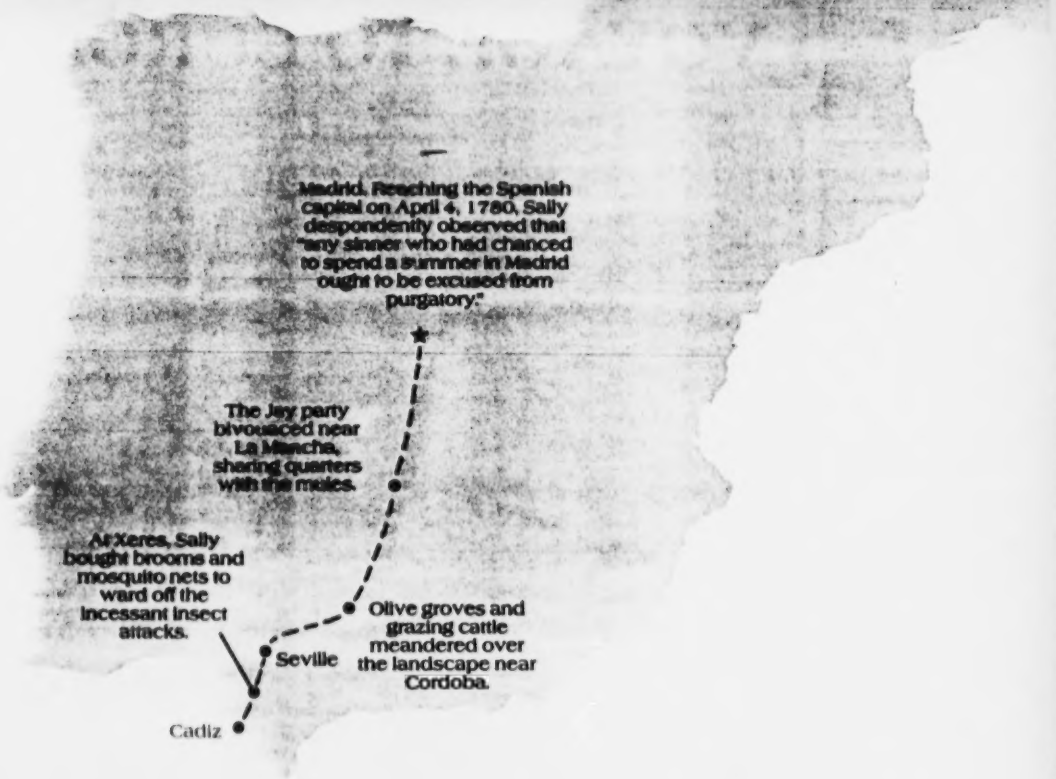
Madrid. Reaching the Spanish capital on April 4, 1780, Sally despondently observed that "any sinner who had chanced to spend a summer in Madrid ought to be excused from purgatory."
The Jay party bivouacked near La Mancha, sharing quarters with the mules.
At Xeres, Sally bought brooms and mosquito nets to ward off the incessant insect attacks.
Olive groves and grazing cattle meandered over the landscape near Cordoba.
Seville
Cadiz

THE MISSION TO SPAIN

Arriving in Cadiz on the southern coast of Spain in January of 1780, the Jays began preparations for the overland journey to Madrid. Sally, now pregnant with their second child, combed the markets in Cadiz for hams, chocolate, sugar, and household supplies, and supervised the packing.

Their small party led a mule train northward toward Xeres. With them was Brockholst Livingston, Sally's brother, who acted as Jay's personal secretary, and Peter Jay Munro, their young nephew.

The assignment was marked by the lack of funds, by poor communication with the Continental Congress, by Spanish duplicity, and by the personal betrayal of Brockholst Livingston, who sought to undermine Jay's efforts. Snubbed by the court of Charles III, their personal finances strained, and grieving over the death of four-week-old Susan, Sally's moods alternated between indignation and despair.

Sally Jay to her mother, Susannah French Livingston, Madrid, August 28, 1780, advising her of Susan's death:

"On monday the 22nd day after the birth of my little innocent, we perceived that she had a fever, but were not apprehensive of danger until the next day when it was attended with a fit. On wednesday the convulsions increased, and on thursday she was the whole day in one continued fit, nor could she close her little eye-lids untill fryday morning the 4th of August at 4 o'clock, when wearied with pain, the little sufferer found rest . . . ."

Courtesy Jay Papers, Special Collections, Columbia University Libraries.

PARIS

The Jays welcomed reassignment to Paris in 1782. Having buried an infant daughter in Madrid and given birth to another, Sally had directed her full attention to her household. Now, the new mission promised reunion with other Americans in the diplomatic corps and an introduction to the celebrated ambience of the French capital.

A third daughter, Ann (Nancy), was born on French soil while complex negotiations leading to the Treaty of Paris dragged on. When the signatories reached agreement, Sally saluted the happy news with this toast:

The United States of America,
may they be perpetual

The Congress

The King and Nation of France

General Washington and
the American Army

The United Netherlands and all
other free States in the world

His Catholic Majesty and all other
Princes and Powers who have
manifested Friendship to America

The Memory of the Patriots
who have fallen
for their Country –

May kindness be shown to their
Widows and Children

The French Officers and Army
who served in America

Gratitude to our Friends and
Moderation to our Enemies

May all our Citizens be Soldiers,
and all our Soldiers Citizens

Concord, Wisdom and Firmness to
all American Councils

May our Country be always
prepared for War,
but disposed to Peace

Liberty and Happiness
to all Mankind.

A diplomat's wife in Paris.
Artist: Alonzo Chappel.

Diversions included Montgolfiers' balloon ascensions and dinners with Dr. Benjamin Franklin, who entertained with demonstrations of the properties of magnetism. Sally sent for the popular novel, *Evelina*, and had the children innoculated against smallpox.

Finally, John Jay completed his peace commissioner duties. Sally was ecstatic at the prospect of returning home; they had not seen Peter Augustus for nearly five years.

Benjamin Franklin.
Courtesy The New York Public Library.

Sally often attended the Paris Opera where she was mistaken for the French queen, Marie Antoinette.

Marie Antoinette.

20

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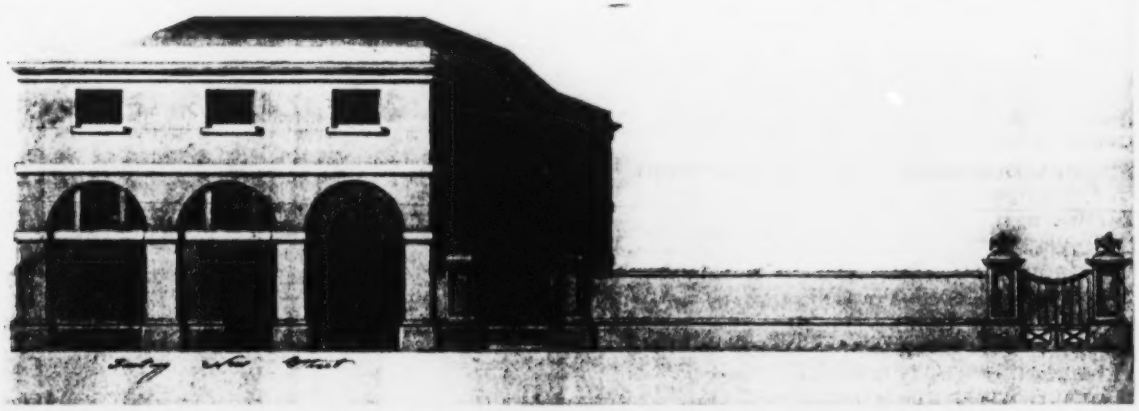
RETURN TO NEW YORK



Plans for the New Street stables at the rear of the Jay residence in Manhattan.
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

1784

On their return to America, a square, three-story stone residence at No. 8 Broadway in New York City housed the Jays, who eagerly embraced the society of long-absent family and friends. Sally's circle included Mrs. Alexander Hamilton (Betsy Schuyler), Mrs. George Clinton (Cornelia Tappen, New York's first "First Lady"), Kitty Duer, and Alice DeLancey Izard.

The household was looked after by servants and slaves. Among them was Benoit, whom the Jays purchased in Martinique, and who accompanied them to Spain and to France. Frequent Jay and Livingston family visits often taxed the accommodations and the staff.

Meanwhile, Maria (born in 1782) and Ann were enrolled at the celebrated Moravian school in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where "were educated a large proportion of the belles who gave the fashionable circles of New York . . . their inspiration. . . ."

This silver coffeepot belonged to the Jays.
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

Kitty Duer.

Betsy Schuyler Hamilton.

Alice DeLancey Izard.

FIRST LADY OF NEW YORK STATE

Sally, William, (born 1789) and Sarah Louisa, (born 1792). Pastel by Sharples.
Courtesy New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.

1795-1801

The unparalleled festivities surrounding President George Washington's inauguration on April 30 highlighted the events of 1789—the convening of the First Federal Congress and the establishment of the national government. With New York designated the national capital, politicians from New Hampshire to Georgia converged on the city.

When John Jay became chief justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1789, the appointment meant separation from Sally and the children, as did his mission to Great Britain in 1793 that resulted in the highly controversial Jay Treaty. His prolonged absences thrust the entire responsibility for the household on her shoulders.

Her husband's election as the state's chief executive in 1796 opened a new chapter in Sally's life. The Jays continued to maintain a home in New York City and rented temporary quarters in Albany when that city became the state capital in 1797. Sally entertained weekly on Thursday evenings and the Jays attended other receptions hosted by prominent neighbors.

Sally Jay may have worn this dress - only the bodice survives - at one of her frequent dinner parties.
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York.

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HER LAST YEARS

A contemporary view of the farmhouse at Bedford.
Courtesy New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

At the turn of the century, the early national era drew to a close, and John Jay retired from public life. The Jays yearned for a future free of the heavy responsibilities they had borne for thirty years. Sally's health, however, began to fail rapidly.

Despite her decline, their long-delayed desire for a country homestead began to materialize. A comfortable farmhouse, surrounded by an array of outbuildings, slowly emerged on a rural Jay family tract in Bedford, Westchester County. Early in 1801, they took possession.

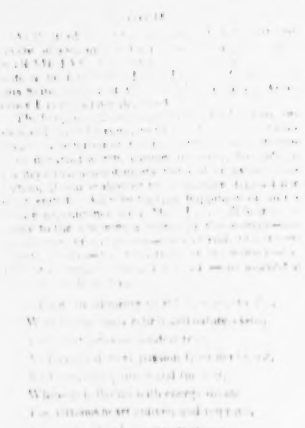
On May 28, 1802, with her husband at her side, Sarah Livingston Jay succumbed to a long-standing illness. She was just forty-six years old-her youngest child, Sarah Louisa, a girl of ten.

A vivacious and intelligent woman, Sally cherished her family and was a devoted and caring mother. The lessons of the years abroad and the challenges encountered at home had seasoned the privileges of birth and tempered the character of the woman whose untimely death was mourned by all who knew her.

Without hesitation, she adopted an international life that held more pitfalls than praise, travelled thousands of miles under the most primitive conditions, negotiated the minefields of politics and diplomacy, and mastered the slippery slopes of Parisian salons. She remained, until the end, a beloved wife and companion.

Sally is interred in the Jay family vault at "The Locusts," Rye.

Sally's white satin evening slippers. They featured a low, curved heel and were trimmed with pink satin piping.
Courtesy Museum of the City of New York



Sally's obituary appeared in the New York press on June 4, 1802.
Courtesy New York State Library, Division of Manuscripts and Special Collections

The Executive Mansion
Albany, New York

Dear Friends,

The role of the First Lady of New York State has changed dramatically since the first governor took office over 200 years ago. It is only in recent history that the First Lady has assumed a strong public role, pursuing her own agenda within the framework of priorities established by the governor.

This changing image is best personified by Eleanor Roosevelt, an undaunting advocate of human rights. She fought courageously for those oppressed by injustice, poverty, and war, and she continues to be an important model not only for First Ladies and women in leadership but for all who envision and strive for a just world.

The First Ladies of the 18th century led vastly different lives from Mrs. Roosevelt. Nonetheless, this teaching exhibit on Cornelia Tappen Clinton and Sarah Livingston Jay will point to women who were influential, courageous and colorful.

This exhibit, which has been prepared by the New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, will give us the opportunity to become familiar with the first two "First Ladies" of New York State who witnessed the establishment of the State and of the national government.

Learning about the history of our State and the people who made that history is an important endeavor for all of New York's citizens. I hope that those with the opportunity to study this teaching exhibit will find the experience to be a richly rewarding and informative one.

I congratulate those who had the foresight to put the exhibit together. I also extend my very best wishes to those who will take the time to learn more about these very special women and the many contributions they made to the State of New York during the 18th century.

Sincerely,

Matilda Cuomo

Matilda Raffa Cuomo

"First Ladies of New York State" is an educational project of the New York State Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution.

Cultural Education Center 9D-30
Empire State Plaza
Albany, New York 12230
(518) 473-6191

Teaching packet and poster design by Leigh Ann Smith.
Photos by Gary Gold.

New York State Education Department